The evolution of the Italian language is a long process that began with the Roman Empire.

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The ancient Romans didn't have just one way of speaking **Latin**; rather, there were **two distinct registers**: ***latine loqui*** and ***romanice loqui***. These were different levels of the same language, much like what happens in all languages today. There was a refined, educated, and formal register, and a more popular, everyday one, which could also vary depending on the speaker's level of education. In this case, *latine loqui* referred to Classical Latin, used in writing and spoken by educated individuals—typically the patrician class. On the other hand, *romanice loqui* was the Latin spoken by common people, often less formally educated.
This *romanice loqui* is the origin of the Romance languages, including Italian.

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With the **fall of the Roman Empire**, ***Latine Loqui* was no longer taught**, and ***romanice loqui*** *(*more often called vulgar Latin) began to **evolve more rapidly**. The **process** was **accelerated** by the **arrival** of **Barbarian** populations from **Northern Europe** starting in the **5th century CE**. These populations brought their own languages, which contaminated the vulgar Latin spoken in Italy.
The **Roman Empire was big**. And the same happened in **Spain, Portugal, France and Romanian**. In Greece, and the south eastern part of the empire the empire lasted another 1000 years, and the language in that region has always been Greek, even during the unified roman empire. But anyway, that's another story

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Other factors that contributed to the evolution of the Italian language include the **arrival of the Byzantines in Southern Italy, the Arab conquest of Sicily, and later on the rise of the Maritime Republics**. All of these events **brought new people, cultures, and languages to Italy**, further **mixing with the existing vulgar Latin**. And that's why the vulgar languages in Italy differ so much from the north, center and south.
For 500 years those **vulgar languages have been only spoken**. Classical **Latin** (slowly evolving into Ecclesiastical Latin) **kept being the written language of the peninsula**.

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The first written examples of vulgar, non-Latin, **language** in Italy are the **Placiti Cassinesi**, which date back to **960 CE**. These documents were written by a notary and record **declarations about land ownership**

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The **first important literary texts written in a vulgar language appeared in Sicily in the 13th century**. This was during the reign of **Frederick II of Swabia**, who **sponsored a school of poetry** that **experimented with new linguistic and poetic models**. They created **sophisticated poetry** and literature in the **Sicilian vernacular**.
Frederick II died; and the following kings and rulers didn't really care about literature. So the school of Sicilian poetry died here, or at least faded out.

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Around **1300**, **Dante Alighieri showed up:**
His first important work for our language journey is ***De Vulgari Eloquentia*** (1303-1305)***.***
It is a treatise on the beauty and importance of the vernacular language.
Though dealing with the vernacular, Dante **wrote in Latin** to **defend against accusations** of **lack of sophistication** and **uncultured writing**, and **address the academic audience**.
He noticed - and scholars confirm - there was a **sense of linguistic, and cultural unity among Italians.**

So Dante **asked himself** what was the **most correct language** to use **in literary works**.
He recognised the regional variations in the Italian language **but considered them to be part of a single linguistic entity**.
Dante articulates his belief that the **vernacular** could achieve the **same literary status as Latin**, **advocating** for its **use** in **serious literature** and **intellectual discourse.**
After careful examination, **he identified fourteen vernaculars**. Criticised some, such as Milanese, Roman, and even Florentine, and judged others more positively, such as the Sicilian of the Federician poets and the Bolognese of Guinizelli**....** Dante ultimately **determined none** of the fourteen **were yet worthy** of embodying the illustrious vernacular he had in mind, which he believed could only be developed in an "ideal court".

Nonetheless he decided to write his masterpiece, the **Divine Comedy**, in one of those vulgar languages. Which one? His own, the one he knew better: in the **Florentine vernacular. It was a turning point.**

He composed it, according to critics, between 1304/07 and 1321, the years of his exile in Lunigiana and Romagna. Calling it simply **commedia**, the term ***Divine*** was **inserted** by **Boccaccio** in *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, written between 1357 and 1362 and printed in 1477.

But **Dante didn't simply use the Florentine vernacular** as it existed in his time.
He was **influenced by the love poetry of the Provençal troubadours and the Sicilian School of poetry**, the one that flourished under Frederick II. These influences are **evident not only in Dante's vocabulary, but also in rhyme schemes.**

He actively **shaped and enriched the language, coining new words, adapting existing terms, and crafting innovative grammatical structures.**
He used **different linguistic registers**, or levels of formality, to distinguish between characters and situations.
For example, he might employ a more elevated style when dealing with theological concepts and a more colloquial style for dialogues between ordinary people.
This careful attention to language reflects Dante's deep understanding of the expressive potential of his chosen vernacular, and **transformed it into a powerful literary tool**, capable of expressing the full range of human experience that Dante sought to portray in the *Divine Comedy*.

It is often said that Dante Alighieri **used vernacular language as a symbol of linguistic provocation**, a deliberate act of resistance against linguistic dominance of Latin as high literate language, and the dominance of the clerical in general.
Considering how critical he is of the Church in his comedy (he placed his contemporary Pope in Hell!) it's not hard to believe.

The popularity of the Divine Comedy was immense. Because it was not written in Latin, **it could be understood not only by the highly educated but also by ordinary people.**
Italian dialects were more similar to each other than they are today. (I think the Florentines were facilitated, but the's not the point). Ah. And by *ordinary* I mean still educated people—not necessarily aristocrats, but literate or somewhat educated. Upper class. Dante himself was a noble of the second order.
It was a couple hundred years before Gutenberg, books cost as much as a nice car today. Only people of means could afford a book. But sometimes, in monasteries, churches or even courts, you could enjoy it read by someone else. It seems that reading aloud was quite common.
As **dialects diverged over time**, people **began to feel** the **need for a standardised language** for **trade** and **other interactions** across the peninsula, not just for religious and academic purposes.

The **Divine Comedy's** popularity **helped make the Florentine vernacular the literary language of Italy**.
But not by itself:

> It is not by chance that it happened in Florence. **Tuscany** at that time **was one of the richest** and **most culturally active place in Europe**. It was a **political and economical power**. A **banking center**.
> Pope Boniface VIII - *the one Dante placed in hell!* - famously remarked that the world consisted of four elements—fire, air, earth, and water—and a fifth: Florentines, because they could be found everywhere. And with them, the Florentine language.
> If Tuscany had been poor, it most likely would not have produced or sponsored its literature, and spread it with its political and economic influence, and we would now be talking about Italian as a product of Sicilian or Venetian, or who knows what else.

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In pretty much the **same time** periods, other writers, such as **Boccaccio** and **Petrarca**, imitated Dante, **further establishing the Florentine** vernacular as the **language of literature**.
Later on, between the 1400/1500, important Tuscans like Machiavelli used to write in Florentine.
In the **same time** being even **Northern Italian writers like Bembo, Ariosto, and Tasso adopted Florentine** as their language.

But that's not all—the South hasn't been isolated either.
Let's take a brief detour into the *Mezzogiorno*:

(1309 - 1381) **The influx of Florentine merchants** during the reigns of Roberto and Giovanna I **introduced Tuscan literature into the kingdom**, leading to interaction between Neapolitan and Florentine, particularly in the commercial sphere.

Early 1400: A resurgence of Greek language and studies occurred in the early 15th century, driven by the arrival of Greek-speaking refugees fleeing the Ottoman Empire.

1442 : Alfonso V of Aragon's conquest brought about a **trilingual court, with Latin, Neapolitan, and Castilian,** each serving specific functions.
Latin dominated the chancery, Neapolitan was used for public administration, and Castilian was employed by Spanish-speaking officials. Tuscan was also used in certain administrative sectors.

1458: **Ferrante**'s ascension to the throne marked a **turning point**, with **Tuscan** (Italian) **gaining official status as a court language** and becoming a **dominant literary language alongside Latin**. This shift towards Italian was driven by Ferrante's personal preference and the **increasing presence** of **native Italian speakers in the court and bureaucracy**. By the mid-16th century, **Italian had largely supplanted Neapolitan in administration**.
While **Catalan was used in commerce**, it **never achieved the status** of a **court** or **administrative language**.

The early 16th century saw the publication of Jacopo Sannazzaro's *Arcadia*, a pivotal work in Italian literature written by a native of the Kingdom of Naples. This pastoral novel, along with the increasing influence of figures like Pietro Bembo, further cemented the position of Italian in the literary landscape.

By the **17th century**, **Italian it outnumbered Latin in published works**. Despite this, **Neapolitan continued** to **thrive** as the **primary spoken language** for the **majority** of the **population**, **including** some **intellectuals** and even **members** of the **Bourbon court**.

Neapolitan also **achieved literary recognition** with works like **Basile's *Lo cunto de li cunti***.

Italian remained the **language** of **prominent figures** in **literature**, **philosophy**, **law**, and **economics**, and **eventually became the sole official language of the state, replacing Latin in higher education institutions**. Latin, however, persisted in certain academic and religious institutions.

And what about the rest of Europe?

During the Renaissance, **Italian enjoyed a period of international prominence as a language of culture and diplomacy**. This was due to Italy's cultural dominance in art, literature, music and science.
It is no coincidence that **Shakespeare set** numerous **works** in **Italy** and are **based** on **Italian stories**.
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Queen **Elizabeth I of England spoke fluent Italian** and used it **when receiving ambassadors from Italian states**. Now it is definitely the other way round.
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Italian even served as a diplomatic language in Eastern Europe. For instance, Italian facilitated communication between the Ottoman and Russian empires. A treaty ending a war between them in 1774 was drafted in Italian, and then translated into Turkish and Russian, because the Turks, familiar with Italian through their interactions with the Venetians, could understand it, and the Russians also had individuals who knew Italian**.**

- The Italian poet Metastasio held the position of court poet in Vienna in the 18th century, writing poetry and libretti in Italian.
- Italian libretti were also standard for operas, even those by renowned composers like Mozart, until he started to complain about and decided to promote German opera and commissioned a German libretto for *The Magic Flute*.

However, **by the 17th and 18th centuries, France emerged as the dominant European power.** French **became the language of the Enlightenment**, a philosophical movement that swept across Europe. This cultural and political dominance, coupled with Italy's decline in political influence and economic prosperity, led to **French replacing Italian as the leading European language.**

What about Latin?

Latin had been a universal Western language for a long time.

Apart from the **Church**, which of course **retained Latin** - Latin remained the exclusive language of liturgy and rites until it was **abolished** by the **Second Vatican Council in 1962-1965**.

Latin continued to be the **language of science,** even if in even though it was in **slow decline (**some illustrious authors like **Galileo and Descartes** started to **write in their own language,** and **many books in latin** were **translated into Italian and other languages.)**

An **anecdote** about the French philosopher **Pascal**, who was **writing** a **letter** to a **friend** in the **1600s**: Pascal **began** the letter in **French**, but then **switched** to **Latin** to **describe** a **mathematical problem**. He **apologised for having to switch to Latin** because **mathematical concepts could not be expressed in French.**

The decline of Latin as the primary language of science and academia began in the 18th and 19th centuries with the rise of national languages such as French, German, and English.
This **transition was influenced by** movements like the **Enlightenment and Romanticism,** which emphasised **vernacular** languages **for broader accessibility.**

The **role** of **Latin** has now been **replaced** by **English** as the international lingua franca. At the time, **Latin** was considered **neutral** because no country could claim it as their native tongue, whereas **English** today is the **mother tongue** of **some nations** but not others.

Up **today Latin** is still **widely used** in **biological nomenclature** and many **scientific terms** and **phrases** derive from Latin, contributing to a shared vocabulary among scientists globally, facilitating communication across linguistic barriers.
Latin is also still present in our everyday language, being the root of the vast majority of words in the Romance languages (and it is estimated that between 50 and 60% of the English lexicon is derived in some way from Latin).

Back to our topic:

- **By the end of the 16th century, Florentine was considered the official literary language of Italy**.

In 1585, the **Accademia della Crusca was founded in Florence**. It is considered the first linguistic academy in the world.
Aimed to study, control, and preserve the purity of the Florentine language/Italian.

About 60 years later in Paris has been founded the Académie française, established in 1635 by Cardinal Richelieu. They copied us! (I couldn't resist a bit of Italian pride here)

Fast forward a couple centuries. (We will mention these missing centuries in the "questione delle lingua" section.)
We are now **approaching** the **Italian unification**. Let's do a recap at the **Political and geographical situation in Italy pre-unification:**

(Here is a **map** of Italy in the **period** between **1816** and **1861** (year of official unification). Rome was actually taken in 1870. Italy's current borders are actually from the end of the Second World War)

Regno di Sardegna:
Ruled by the House of **Savoy,** one of the oldest dynasties in Europe, documented since the end of the 10th century. Of **French descent**, they went on to **rule** the **Kingdom** of **Italy**.

Italian had become an **official language** in the **Sardinian mainland** states following the edict of Rivoli in **1561**, while in **Sardinia** it became so in **1760.**

French was the **court language.** The king was bilingual.

Other languages/dialects spoken in the kingdom were:
Mostly **Piedmontese**, **Sardinian** and **Ligurian**.
Other dialects, spoken by a minority part of the population in more restricted geographical areas:
Franco-Provençal, Occitan, Lombard, Corsican Gallurese, Catalan Algherese, Sassarese, Castellanese.
There was unfortunately little literature in languages other than Italian and French.

Regno Lombardo Veneto:
It was an administrative division of the **Austrian Empire**.
Interestingly, in his 'Memoirs of the Italian War of 1848-1849', the Austrian General Karl Schönhals notes that
The **language of instruction and office was Italian**, from the viceroy's cabinet down to the district commissioner, from the president of the Supreme Senate of Justice down to the praetor. The **German employee** who wanted to pursue his career in Italy **had** to **learn** the **language of the country first**. The same condition was not imposed on the Italian clerk", but since Italians were considered to be contemptuous of the "affairs of state" and reluctant to "study hard, you will now understand why Austria could not choose its governors, its presidents of courts, its generals from among the Italian nobility".

Official language: **Italian**, except for communication with the Austrian mother country.
Italian was also the **literary language**, of which **Alessandro Manzoni** was the greatest representative, and was **taught** at **school**.

Various dialects were also **spoken** throughout the kingdom, some of which could boast their own literary tradition.
Lombardy:

Dialects spoken:
Milanese dialect: predominant in the provinces of Milan, Pavia, Lodi, Cremona and Como; has a rich literary production (e.g. Carlo Porta, Tommaso Grossi).
Eastern **Lombard** dialects: spoken in Bergamo and Brescia, phonologically distinct from the western ones.
A dialect of the Emilian language was spoken in the province of Mantua.

Veneto:

Veneto language: widespread with Lombard influences, especially in the province of Padua; used in literary productions (e.g. comedies by Carlo Goldoni).
Cimbrian: spoken in the Sette Comuni plateau (province of Vicenza).
Rhaeto-Romanic languages:
Ladin: spoken in the province of Belluno.
Friulian: spoken in Friuli.

Duchy of Parma:
Official languages: Latin and Italian. **Spoken languages: Italian and Emilian**

Duchy of Modena:
Official Languages: Italian. Spoken Languages: Italian and Emilian.

Grand Duchy of Tuscany: Official Languages: **Italian**. Spoken Languages: **Italian** and Tuscan and his provincial variants (Florentine, Sienese, Arezzo, etc.).
Literature: Well, practically this whole document is about Tuscan literature.

Papal State:
Official language:

Latin: Used for official and institutional publications. Vehicle language of the ecclesiastical hierarchies in medieval times. Gradual replacement by Italian in modern times.

Instruction:

Italian: **Language of elementary, compulsory and free education**.
Widely used for official documents in the 19th century (e.g. Fundamental Statute).

Local dialects:

Roman or Romanesco, **Umbrian**, **Marchigiano**, **Emiliano**, **Romagnolo** and **Bolognese** in the north. In the South, contaminations with Neapolitan and Beneventan.

Literature not in Italian: The most illustrious is certainly **Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli**.

Kingdom of the Two Sicilies:

The Kingdom of the Two Sicilies was an absolute monarchy of **Spanish origin**, established during the Restoration period (Congress of Vienna) by the unification of the Kingdom of Naples and the Kingdom of Sicily, both under **Bourbon** rule.

Official language:

Italian, used for bureaucracy, education, and formal communication.

Main dialects and languages spoken:

Continental territories: **Neapolitan** and **Calabrian** dialects (intermediate southern languages).

Sicily: **Sicilian**.

Language minorities:

Greek speakers in Calabria and Apulia (spoke Greek).

Albanians in Sicily and Calabria (they spoke Albanian).

Evolution of dialects:

Dialects were not transcribed; written communication was mainly in Latin and Italian.

High illiteracy rates in southern Italy limited writing in dialects.

Traces of dialects can be found in expressions of educated people.

We have already mentioned literature and the evolution of the language in the sections on the south

Back to our main story:

The first important point to make is this: At that time The **economy** of the Italian peninsula **was**, on average, **quite poor**, especially compared to the rest of Europe and also compared to its past. **Tuscany wasn't doing well either**.

This, **together** with the new ideologies of the **Enlightenment** and **Romanticism**, as well as **European nationalist movements**, **strengthened** the **feeling** of **unification**, with the **aim** and **hope** of **improving** one's own **economic**, **social** and **geopolitical situation**, of **recovering one's own territory**, of "driving out the invaders". a kind of **desire** for **self-determination**.

Here comes, for our **language story**, **Alessandro Manzoni,** a hugely famous writer **from Milan**. After years of intense linguistic studies, **1840** saw the publication of the definitive edition of **I Promessi Sposi** (The Betrothed) **on the model of the cultured Florentine**, which presented even more than Tuscan, this **unitary dimension between** the **oral** and the **literary version** that Manzoni sought so much.

After the unification of Italy in 1861, **Florentine became the basis for the modern Italian language**. Apparently not without discussion. **Alessandro Manzoni**, strongly **advocated for Florentine to become the national language**. He believed that the literary language should become the spoken language as well.

Driven by Romanticism and its need to establish a **dialogue** with a vast **heterogeneous public**, Manzoni set himself the goal of **finding a language in which there was a lexicon full of terms related to everyday use** and specific areas of knowledge, and **no great disparity between the spoken and written language**.

A little summarised extract from the Treccani Enciclopedia. (The most influential enciclopedia in Italy)

> The **Problem of Linguistic Division:** Before Italian unification in 1861, Italy was a patchwork of small states, each with its dialect. This linguistic fragmentation posed a significant obstacle to creating a unified nation. A common language was crucial for shared identity, communication, and effective governance.
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> **Manzoni's Vision and Advocacy:** Alessandro Manzoni's pivotal role in advocating for the Florentine vernacular as the national language. Manzoni, as we discussed earlier, was a prominent writer and intellectual figure in 19th-century Italy. He believed that a unified Italy needed a unified language, and he saw the Florentine vernacular, already established as the language of literature, as the ideal choice.
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> •

Manzoni's Proposal for "Living Language": Manzoni argued that the national language should be based on the Florentine spoken by **educated Florentines**. This "living language" would be more accessible to the general population than an archaic or purely literary form of Florentine. His novel, *I Promessi Sposi*, which he revised to conform to contemporary Florentine usage, served as a model for this vision of a national language.

- **Debates and Opposition:** Manzoni's proposal was not without opposition. Some advocated for a composite language drawing on elements from various Italian dialects, while others favoured a more conservative approach, sticking closer to Latin. However, Manzoni's influence, combined with the practical need for a unifying language, ultimately led to the widespread adoption of Florentine as the basis for standard Italian.
- **Educational Policies and Standardization:** Following unification, the Italian government implemented educational policies to promote the teaching and use of standard Italian in schools across the country. This effort, alongside the influence of mass media like radio and television, gradually reduced the dominance of spoken regional dialects and solidified the position of standard Italian as the national language.

The Treccani entry underscores how the **Risorgimento served** as a **catalyst** for **linguistic unification**. The **desire for a shared national identity fueled** the **search for a common language**, and **Manzoni emerged as a key figure** in shaping this linguistic landscape. His vision of a **"living language"** based on the Florentine vernacular, along with political and educational initiatives, ultimately led to the establishment of standard Italian.

Something similar happened with the capital. The Italian kingdom needed a capital. The **first** ten years it has been **Turin** (from where the unification process has begun), **than Florence** (considered to be the cultural capital) for another ten years, **and finally**, as soon as being taken, **Rome**. **They chose Rome at the end out of historical significance and "respect". It felt somehow due**.

In view of its centuries-old literary tradition, appreciated by all the world over, it was felt that the Florentine Language - the already de-facto written national language - deserved, and earned the honour of being officially recognised as a national language.

Why do you need a national language in the first place? You may ask.

Well, this is an entire field, and even as a name: "**Questione della lingua**"

This is a debate that preceded the Italian unification by 600 years. This is a sign that an Italian cultural identity, despite all the regional differences and huge economical differences (still present today), had always existed and, in the absence of a unified state, the Italian language played a significant role.

Before that allow me a little digression:

Language doesn't inherently (God if I hate this word applied to history and sociology :)) create divisions, but rather that language is often intertwined with - and can be used to - reinforce, or mitigate existing social and economic hierarchies, due to its incredible power to help reinforcing empathy and cohesion between people.
Language differences don't automatically create negative sentiments, but rather that historical, political, economic, and social forces can exploit these differences to fuel divisions.
Silvano Tagliagambe (an Italian contemporary philosopher and physicist, epistemologist.) posits that **empathy is not solely a biological phenomenon but is also shaped by cultural and linguistic factors.** He cites studies in neurobiology indicating that people are more likely to empathise with those who share their cultural and linguistic background. Shared language, he argues, acts as a facilitator of empathy by providing a common framework for understanding and interpreting the world.

However, Tagliagambe also **cautions against viewing language** as a **purely mechanistic tool** for **social engineering**. He emphasises that empathy and cohesion can be hindered by factors like individualism, competition, and a lack of genuine emotional engagement. This implies that simply having a **common language is not enough** to guarantee social cohesion. Fostering empathy requires emotional intelligence, cultivating a culture of mutual respect, understanding, and shared values.
While a common language **can help, it's not a magical solution to societal problems**, that's why in Italy there are still big economic divisions between north and south.

Now, back to history of Italian:

The "**Questione della lingua**" was a debate about which linguistic model to adopt in the Italian peninsula, which began in the literary field. It was most acute in the early sixteenth century and continued (at least) until Alessandro Manzoni.
Here is a chronological summary of the debate:

- **14th Century:** Dante Alighieri's *De vulgari eloquentia* (1303-04) initiated the debate.
- **15th Century:** Leon Battista Alberti's *Quattro libri della famiglia* (1433-1440) and the *Certame coronario* (1441) elevated the vernacular. Lorenzo de' Medici's *Epistola* accompanying the *Silloge Aragonese* (1477) also championed the vernacular, particularly the Florentine tradition.
- **16th Century: Pietro Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua* (1525) advocated for the primacy of 14th-century Florentine writers (Petrarch for poetry, Boccaccio for prose).** Others, like Gian Giorgio Trissino and Baldassare Castiglione, sought a mixed language from various Italian courts. Niccolò Machiavelli and Pier Francesco Giambullari argued for the Florentine vernacular of their time. Benedetto Varchi, mediating between these positions and Bembo's, contributed to the 1582 founding of the Accademia della Crusca in Florence.
- **17th Century:** The *Vocabolario della Crusca*, heavily influenced by Leonardo Salviati, adopted Bembo's model of 14th-century Florentine, exclusively citing writers adhering to it.
- **18th Century:** The fourth edition of the *Vocabolario della Crusca* was published. The "Caffè" intellectuals, including the Verri brothers, Cesare Beccaria, and Giuseppe Baretti, challenged the Crusca's authority, **proposing English and French linguistic models and a less rigid language**. Melchiorre Cesarotti, while more moderate, also supported language evolution and foreignisms, particularly Gallicisms.
- **19th Century:** Antonio Cesari promoted a "purist" 14th-century Tuscan model. Vincenzo Monti advocated for a language free of archaisms and enriched with scientific and contemporary terms. Alessandro Manzoni, after revising *I promessi sposi*, proposed contemporary spoken Florentine as the model and suggested widespread Tuscan teacher employment and student trips to Tuscany. Giovan Battista Giorgini and Emilio Broglio created the *Novo vocabolario* based on Florentine usage, but it met with limited success. **Graziadio Isaia Ascoli**, critiquing Manzoni's top-down approach, **linked** the **language question** to **social issues**, advocating for **increased education** to allow **natural language evolution**. He knew that it was not possible to get ordinary people to adopt an educated standard, Florentine or otherwise, unless the level of their education was raised so that they could absorb it. **The solution lay** therefore not in trying to persuade people to accept Florentine or any other model, but **in raising the nation's general level of education and allowing the process of natural selection to take its course**.

And This is substantially what has happened, and as a result, the language has actually become less rather than more Florentine since unification, because of the influence of Rome in government administration and the media, and of Northern Italy in the economic life of the nation, and to the resistance of the dialect, and foreign languages like English.

The Italian language continues to evolve, and the Accademia della Crusca monitors and updates its grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Modern Italian differs significantly from the language of Dante and Manzoni, and even from that of fifty years ago, with a future still to be shaped. The process of natural selection described by Graziadio Isaia Ascoli remains ongoing.

It is no surprise, then, that linguist Gaetano Berruti defines the variety of Italian actually spoken—when it diverges from grammatical norms—as ***Neo-Standard Italian***.

What is the state of the Italian language today?

Contemporary Italian is constantly evolving, caught between its formal and informal varieties, and between its written and spoken forms. Although it is often perceived as a conservative language—especially in its formal written form—it continues to change in everyday use through a process known as ***restandardization***, driven by:

- The influence of regional dialects.
- A broader trend toward **simplification** as Italian **transitions** from a primarily **written** language to one used extensively in **everyday speech**.

The most notable simplification appears in the verbal system, where only a limited set of verb forms is commonly used in spoken Italian.
Specifically, we observe the following:

- **Decline of the passato remoto** (preterite past): Largely replaced by the imperfect and passato prossimo in spoken Italian.
- **Weakening of the future tense**: The futuro semplice is increasingly perceived as formal, with the present indicative increasingly used instead.
- **Strengthening of the imperfect tense**: The imperfect is becoming more versatile, taking on modal functions and playing a larger role in hypothetical contexts.

Dialects continue to **play** a **significant role** in the Italian linguistic landscape, though their use is evolving. While they were **once predicted to disappear**, dialects **have shown unexpected vitality**, **adapting** to **new domains** like marketing, social media, and popular music.

The relationship between Italian and its dialects is complex:

- **Dominance of Italian**: As the language of education, administration, and formal settings, Italian exerts pressure on dialects, particularly in vocabulary—a phenomenon known as *Italianization*.
- **Dialectal resistance**: Despite this pressure, dialects exhibit resilience, especially in their inflectional paradigms, which remain largely unaffected by Italianization.

Perceptions of dialects are also shifting:

- **Traditional prejudice**: Dialects were often associated with lower social status and seen as something to be ashamed of.
- **Renewed interest**: There's growing interest in dialects among educated individuals, who are increasingly incorporating them into various forms of expression.
- **Cultural value**: Dialects are increasingly recognised as valuable cultural assets, representing the rich linguistic diversity of Italy.

Despite their evolution and the pressures they face, dialects remain deeply intertwined with Italian identity and continue to thrive in informal settings and everyday interactions. The future of Italian dialects remains uncertain, but their current vitality suggests they will continue to play an important role in Italian society, coexisting and interacting with the standard language in a dynamic and evolving linguistic ecosystem.

Personally, I **suspect** that they **will become** more as different **registers** of the **same language**, **much** as ***latine loqui*** and ***romanice loqui*** **were**. After all, it **is already somewhat like that**. Standard Italian is used in more formal, professional, institutional and academic contexts. As it descends to the more colloquial, informal and recreational register—that of friends and family—it is increasingly mixed with dialectal inflections, accentuating one's regional accent and possibly even speaking pure dialect.

Every Italian knows from direct experience that using Italian with strong dialectal inflections in formal or public contexts, or speaking perfect standard Italian in family or relaxed situations, sounds out of place. **It is a delicate balance that Italians instinctively master**, adapting it to the social context with a naturalness that testifies to the richness and vitality of our linguistic landscape—the result of centuries of cultural stratification.